

My name is John Carnemolla and I am from Tolland. I respectfully request that you **DENY** proposed **Appropriations Bill 6380** to split and consolidate the Board of Education and Services for the Blind.

I am a ninth grade student at Tolland High School, I have been receiving assistance from BESB since I was born. I have been blessed to have had three exceptional teachers of the visually impaired and two wonderful Orientation and Mobility Specialists. My first BESB Teacher, John Reilly, was recently awarded Teacher of the Year.

With the guidance of my BESB team I am standing here before you, an independent, Braille reading, card playing, cane using, computer programming, college preparatory student.

I know transitioning to college will be a difficult step, one that presents additional challenges to myself and other blind students. I have always felt secure in knowing that BESB would be available to assist me. I am very concerned as I work towards high school graduation and prepare for college that there will be a break in guidance if Vocational Rehab and Children Services are split. How can continuity be maintained if the two departments are not within the same agency?

I have also been blessed to have been part of the new programs setup for teens. The Student Advisory Committee and Camp Abilities have been tremendous opportunities for me to meet and get to know other kids like me, learn leadership skills and strengthen my athletic abilities. I have been able to work with and learn from teachers who understand how visually impaired kids are. They see past the visual impairment to who I really am and all that I can do.

If BESB is split apart and consolidated into other departments will they be able to maintain these fantastic programs? Will we be able to be a community? I am afraid that if BESB is split apart we will lose so much of what we have grown to be.

Thank you for this opportunity to speak today.